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ABSTRACT

Family literacy programs have arisen in an attempt to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and illiteracy. Numerous federally-supported family literacy programs have recognized the importance of instructing parents and children in a home setting. The legislation of Even Start seeks to integrate parenting education, adult basic education, and early childhood education into a comprehensive program which builds school readiness and future economic self-sufficiency. Even Start is the first federal legislation to support a comprehensive parenting, adult, and early childhood program. This report details a proposed study which would consist of 160 children and 160 adults enrolled in an eight-site Even Start family literacy program in north central Florida. The report's sections are: (1) "Theoretical Framework," mentioning pioneering studies of Ira Golden (1970, 1976); (2) "Previous Research in Home Visiting," consisting of a literature review; (3) "Objectives of the Study," including the stated purposes of examining the pedagogical form and content of the home visiting component in family literacy programs funded by Even Start; (4) "Design," including proposed subjects, treatment, and statistical methods; (5) "Educational Importance," asserting that examining curricula and pedagogy of home visiting might facilitate discovery of teaching practices which best assist families in transition from home to school settings. Contains 17 references. (BGC)

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The Home Visit as a Teaching Event:

Lessons from Eight Even Start Family Literacy Sites

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Introduction

Family literacy programs have arisen in an attempt to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and illiteracy (Darling, 1988; Morrow, 1995). Numerous federally-supported, family literacy programs have recognized the importance of providing instruction to parents and children in a home setting. The enabling legislation of Even Start, for example, seeks to integrate parenting education, adult basic education, and early childhood education into a comprehensive program that fosters school readiness in the short term and economic self-sufficiency in the long term. By law, Even Start's parenting education and early childhood education must include a home visiting component.

At least three rationales are usually given for including a home visiting component in family literacy programs, in addition to providing center-based activities and a network of referrals. Home visiting is said to: 1) provide occasions for building a caring, interpersonal relationship between family members and instructional staff (Powell, 1993); 2) sensitize staff to the background conditions that may impede family members' learning (Wasik, 1993); and 3) overcome the initial reluctance of low-educational-attainment adults to reentering publicly-verified learning environments by offering them one-on-one tutoring (Halpern, 1993).

Because these rationales cover such a wide area—affect, staff development, and pedagogy—family literacy programs such as Even Start permit individual sites to customize their home visiting component to accomplish the objectives that local program managers deem most crucial for preparing adults and children to succeed in group educational settings. Even Start stipulates that funds be set aside for a local independent evaluation to assure that all program components are integrated and that goals and objectives are being measured adequately. Evaluation funds,

however, were not intended, nor would they be sufficient, to conduct systematic research into factors which relate to between-site differences in outcomes. Such inquiry would require additional funding so that program staff could be 1) allocated to specific planned variations in home visiting, 2) provided clerical support for data collection and aggregation, and 3) released periodically to reflect on and discuss the adequacy and progress of the research enterprise.

Programs with multiple sites in particular often display great variety in how the home visiting component is implemented. Variations generally noted include the recipient (parent or child or parent-child dyad); the curriculum (Ages and Stages, Bowdoin, Kenan, Hawaii Early Learning Profile, High Scope, Parents as Teachers), the pedagogic style (direct instruction, modeling, facilitation); and the instructors' qualifications (certified early childhood educator, family liaison specialist, paraprofessional aide). As a result of these numerous options being exercised in delivering home visiting, it has proven virtually impossible to discern *which variations* in home visiting are more effective than others in preparing adults and children to succeed in group educational settings (Winter, 1995).

Theoretical Framework:

The efficacy of offering instruction in familiar home surroundings to parents of low educational attainment was first clearly documented in the pioneering studies of Ira Gordon (1970, 1976). Gordon showed that children whose parents had been tutored on a variety of topics related to child development showed greater success in school than children whose parents had received no instruction. The chief modality for this instruction was weekly home visits by paraprofessionals who lived in the target community but who had been trained to model developmentally valuable parent-child activities. Since Gordon's reports of academic success,

nearly every school readiness program has incorporated a home visiting component to deliver instruction on a wide variety of topics to both parents and children, separately and together (Cochran, 1988; Powell, 1990, 1993; Roberts & Wasik, 1994).

The Final Report of the National Evaluation of Even Start (St. Pierre, et al. 1995) found that "there is a strong, positive relationship between the amount of home-based services and the length of program participation" (p. 253). It was concluded from that finding that "program retention is increased in projects that provide larger amounts of home-based services" (p. 256). Moreover, as with many educational interventions, the longer participants stayed in the program, the larger were their gains on standardized tests (p. 248). However, we still do not know *which content* delivered *under what structure* of home visiting most strongly correlates with improved rates of participation, retention, and literacy acquisition for families. While it is unlikely that there is a single best practice, given the differing circumstances in which family literacy programs operate, a controlled research study has the power to determine which factors within home visiting are significantly related to gains on measures of family literacy development. Until some of the important variations in home visiting are manipulated and statistically controlled, there is no sound basis for making any inferences about the format of this mandated program component to any subsequent changes in program participants' performance.,

Previous Research on Home Visiting

The most extensive recent survey of the knowledge base on home visiting appeared in a special issue of the journal, The Future of Children, Vol. 3, No. 3 Winter (Behrman, 1993. A number of articles in that particular issue have already been cited. See References). Many

contributors to that volume noted the fact that home visiting has rarely been subject to rigorous statistical scrutiny.

It has also been established that the instructional techniques and interpersonal skills used by home visitors need to be culturally sensitive if they are to succeed in establishing and maintaining the affiliation and motivation of parents and children. (Gadsden, 1994; Wayman, Lynch, & Hanson, 1991, Slaughter-Defoe, 1993).

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this [proposed] study is to examine the pedagogical form and content of the home visiting component in eight family literacy programs. All eight sites were funded by Even Start, the first federal legislation to support a planned variation model that combines adult education, early childhood education, and parent education into a single intergenerational literacy program. Similarities and differences in the way each of the eight Even Start elements were delivered in participants' homes will be shown to have been a function of (1) the model of family literacy adopted, (2) the instructional material and modalities selected, and (3) the qualifications of the personnel trained and assigned to carry out the intervention.

The aim of the study is to identify which home visiting components—the frequency and duration of the visit, the content of the interaction (e.g., instruction, assistance and awareness, or counseling), the recipient of the instruction (parent, child, or parent and child together), and the qualifications of the visitor (lead teacher, family liaison, or parent educator)—are related to changes in parents and children's level of performance as measured by standardized assessments of progress used uniformly across the eight Even Start sites. Should some of the independent variables prove to be significantly related to outcome, then follow-up analyses would be able to

reveal which constellation of program variables produces the greatest gains. Such findings could serve as a lens to examine other family literacy programs that also employ home visiting, determining whether program variables have been organized to achieve maximum educational benefits.

Design

The proposed study uses a multivariate regression design to isolate and manipulate variables within a family literacy program that may influence child and parent performance on standardized measures of developmental progress and literacy acquisition. Four questions will be explored in the study: 1) Is there a difference in child and adult outcome measures when a lead teacher, a family liaison, or a combination of lead teacher and parent educator are the home visitors? 2) When the primary recipient of a home visit is specified—the child, the parent, or the child-parent dyad— which focus produces the largest gains on measures of preschool readiness, elementary school performance, parenting skills and literacy acquisition? 3) Which home visiting content (instruction, assistance and awareness, or counseling) is associated with the greatest gains in acquiring literacy skills as measured by the degree of integration into formal educational settings? and 4) In cases where program families have received home visits, is there a difference in the amount they gain compared to parents enrolled for one year only?

Only in a multi-site setting such as the family literacy program described in this proposed study which has a set of common program characteristics (similar populations, similar curriculum, similar staff) can program characteristics be held constant and planned variations introduced in the home visiting component in order to investigate rigorously the relationship between the structure and content of home visiting and program outcomes. This study proposes

to organize an already-existing 8-site family literacy program into a planned variation model to examine which variables in the home visiting component are related to performance on a variety of parent and child outcome measures.

The proposed study will use a multivariate research design to assess the effect of eight (8) independent variables on six (6) dependent variables. The directional hypothesis to be investigated is that certain variations in the components of home visiting may be related to higher levels of performance on a variety of child and adult outcome measures that are literacy related.

Subjects

The sample population for this study will consist of 160 children and 160 adults enrolled in an eight-site Even Start family literacy program in north central Florida. In the event there are several children in the household, data on one school-aged child will be collected for the study. Even Start mandates, however, that all siblings receive instruction. The research design will allow us to look at and control for the presence of multiple children receiving instruction during home visits.

Treatment

These 160 family pairs will receive home visits twice a month for approximately one hour each visit over a period of 15 to 18 months or until 1440 minutes of home visiting have been completed (24 visits lasting an average of 60 minutes). The bi-weekly schedule is twice as intensive as the once a month visit Even Start participants usually receive (and which non-study subjects will continue to receive). The extension of the study's timeline to collect data for six quarters is necessary in light of the past experience of home visitors. Unexpected circumstances may curtail completion of a home visit or sometimes family illness may cause postponement of

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the home visit altogether. It is also anticipated that data collection may fall off during the summer of 1997 when school is out and some families disperse or temporarily leave the area. Because of what has previously been learned about the nature of families "most in need", this study is designed to accommodate potential gaps in the data collection of twice-a-month, 60-minute home visits.

Data Collection

Home visitors will log the number of minutes during a home visit in which they are engaged primarily with the target child, the parent, and/or the child and parent together. Home visitors will also log the number of minutes during a home visit in which they provide instruction, assistance and awareness, and/or counseling.

Quantitative Measures.

Independent variables:

1. Qualifications of the Visitor [categorical variable with 3 levels]. Home visits will be conducted by either a lead teacher, a family liaison, or a combination of lead teacher and parent educator. Assignment of visitor type across the eight districts is represented in the following grid.

Lead Teacher	Family Liaison	Lead Teacher & Parent Educator
District N	District U	District B
District P	District C	District G
----------	District D	District L

2. Recipient of Visit—Child [Continuous variable]. Total number of minutes spent with child out of a possible 1440 minutes of home visiting.
3. Recipient of Visit—Parent [Continuous variable]. Total number of minutes spent with parent out of a possible 1440 minutes of home visiting.
4. Recipient of Visit— Parent and Child Together [Continuous variable]. Total number of minutes spent with parent and child together out of a possible 1440 minutes of home visiting.
5. Content of Visit—Instruction [Continuous variable]. Total number of minutes spent providing instruction out of a possible 1440 minutes of home visiting.
6. Content of Visit—Assistance and Awareness [Continuous variable]. Total number of minutes spent providing assistance and awareness out of a possible 1440 minutes of home visiting.
7. Content of Visit—Counseling [Continuous variable]. Total number of minutes spent providing counseling out of a possible 1440 minutes of home visiting.
8. Pre-Visit [Continuous variable]. Number of minutes family received home visits before onset of study. This last variable takes into account that some families may have previously received home visits during the program's second year of operation (Oct. 1, 1995- Sept. 30, 1996). Rather than exclude these families, they can be included in the study and identified using this variable. Logs of the previous year's (monthly) home visits will be reviewed and total time spent with family will be computed. This design feature will permit a subsidiary comparison

of gains made by multi-year families versus gains made by families receiving 1440 minutes of home visiting only.

Dependent variables:

1. Parent Gain. Pre- to post test gains made by parents on the Even Start Parenting Inventory. This inventory indicates changes in ways parents communicate and foster literacy.
2. Child Gain. Pre- to post test gains made by children on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. This observation instrument measures children's growth in social and cognitive competence. Local districts standardized measures will be reported as expressed in standard deviation units.
3. Child Attendance. Number of days child was absent from preschool or elementary school January 1, 1997 through June 1, 1998.
4. Parent Attendance. Number of days parent was absent from adult education classes January 1, 1997 through June 1, 1998. Variables 3 and 4 are an indirect measure of family members' integration into a public education setting.
5. Teacher report on child's performance. Preschool or elementary school teachers' estimate of children functioning using a three-point scale— above, at, or below age-appropriate developmental level.
6. Teacher report on parent's performance. Adult education teacher estimate of adult functioning using a three-point scale— above, at, or below average performance. Variables 5 and 6 will include teacher ratings on all students in their classroom to assure that they are blind to the Even Start affiliation of study

sample parents and children. This design feature will permit the results on measures 5 and 6 to be also reported as a comparison between students who received home visiting and classroom peers who did not.

Statistical Methods

Multivariate regression techniques will be used to determine the strength of the relationship between the eight (8) independent variables and the six (6) dependent variables. The sampling strategy will yield a total of 160 observations. Each observation will comprise all the information about the characteristics of the home visit made to a particular family aggregated over the full course of treatment, that is, 1440 minutes. Thus each observation would tell us about the qualifications of the home visitor (χ_1), the total number of minutes spent with the child (χ_2), the total number of minutes spent with the parent (χ_3), the total number of minutes spent with the parent and child together (χ_4), the total number of minutes spent providing instruction (χ_5), the total number of minutes spent providing assistance and awareness (χ_6), the total number of minutes spent engaged in counseling (χ_7), and the total number of minutes the family was visited before the study began (χ_8). Thus the general form for the regression models will be:

$$\left.\begin{matrix} Y_{i1} \\ \\ \end{matrix}\right\}$$

$$Y_{i6} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\chi_1 + \beta_2\chi_2 + \beta_3\chi_3 + \beta_4\chi_4 + \beta_5\chi_5 + \beta_6\chi_6 + \beta_7\chi_7 + \beta_8\chi_8 + \in$$

Where $Y_{i1} \ldots Y_{i6}$ are the 6 dependent variables, β_0 is the intercept, $\chi_1 \ldots \chi_8$ are the 8 independent variables, $\beta_1 \ldots \beta_8$ are their regression coefficients, and $\in$ is random error. [The

analysis will also include two constraints since variables χ_2, χ_3, and χ_4, and χ_5, χ_6 and χ_7 each have to add up to 1440 minutes.]

One hundred sixty observations is sufficiently large to guarantee that the analysis will have the power to detect significant differences among home visiting conditions that may be associated with developmental progress and literacy acquisition. The use of these multivariate techniques will enable the researchers to examine simultaneously possible main effects of the independent variables, as well as interactions among them. The results should be able to shed light on how the quantity and quality of time spent during the home visit and the quality and quantity of the home visitors contribute to parent and children integrating into formal educational settings.

Qualitative Measures. District level program directors and site managers, home visiting staff, and adult participants at eight Even Start sites in Florida will also interviewed over the course of one year as part of a local independent evaluation of program effectiveness. (Even Start projects are also required to participate in a national evaluation which consists of submitting a database file of family and program characteristics). Program directors and site managers will be questioned about the family literacy model that had been selected to guide the overall program and its home visiting component in particular. Teachers on special assignment, family liaison specialists, and paraprofessionals, all of whom at the different sites had received training in conducting home visit instructional lessons, will be asked to describe the (1) curriculum content of each of the eight Even Start components (adult education, parent education, and early childhood education) that were delivered in the home setting; (2) teaching methods used with adults and children; (3) changes in participants' behavior, attitudes, and expectations. Parents

will be asked to: (1) compare home- and center-based instruction; and (2) estimate the effect of each on their own and their child's progress in achieving academic and social goals that they had set in concert with program staff. Also, logs and progress reports compiled by home visitors will be reviewed to assess the degree to which coherence across the tripartite instructional design was maintained.

Educational importance

There is increasing evidence that teaching low literacy parents and their children simultaneously produces positive educational effects for both generations (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Since low literacy is often the result of early school leaving, many adults who might consider resuming their education have deep-seated reservations about returning to a classroom environment. The home visit component of the Even Start family literacy program is a teaching site that potentially can build the confidence of adults and children to tackle the challenge of public assessment. By examining variations in curricula and pedagogy of home visiting, light may be shed on which teaching practices best assist families in the transition from home to school settings.

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